

News Bulletin



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Hawaii's Plant Extinction Prevention Program Recognized with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Recovery Champions Award

A team of Hawaii botanists and resource managers are being honored as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Recovery Champions for their invaluable work in restoring rare Hawaiian plants and their biologically diverse ecosystems. Today, the Service recognized 55 individuals and teams for their exceptional efforts to conserve and protect the nation's rarest fish, wildlife and plants by designating them 2013 Recovery Champions.

"We all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to these dedicated conservationists who are on the front lines fighting the battle against extinction," said Service Director Dan Ashe. "Their spirit and determination is the application of Aldo Leopold's counsel to 'keep every cog and wheel,' and they provide hope for all of us that our children and the generations that follow will be able to enjoy the same tremendous diversity of plants and animals that we do today."

Hawaii comprises only 0.2 percent of the U.S. landmass, but has 49 percent of the nation's listed plant species. Nearly half of Hawaiian flora is considered threatened at some level. Since 2003, scientists have come together from a multitude of agencies and organizations to identify more than 200 rare plant species in Hawaii with fewer than 50 individuals of each species remaining in the wild. The Hawaii conservation community has dubbed the program that works to preserve this group of plants the Plant Extinction Prevention program or PEP.

The group's members being honored today are Ane Bakutis, Keahi Bustamente, Kristen Coelho, Susan Ching Harbin, Joel Lau, Mike Long, Hank Oppenheimer, Patty Pali, Steve Perlman, Talia Portner, Josh VanDeMark, Marie Bruegmann, Vickie Caraway, and Wendy Kishida. The program is directed by Joan Yoshioka, the statewide coordinator. The program is operated through the University of Hawaii's Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit (PCSU), and is one of the many cultural and natural resource conservation projects PCSU supports.

"The work of these dedicated professionals helps both federally listed and non-listed, rare plant species get to the point at which they are secure in the wild and no longer need Endangered Species Act protection," said Loyal Mehrhoff, field supervisor for the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office.

The Plant Extinction Prevention program's mission is to protect Hawaii's rarest native plants from extinction. They are committed to reversing the trend toward extinction by managing wild plants, collecting seeds and

establishing new populations. They focus on species that have fewer than 50 plants remaining in the wild, collaborating with conservation partners who have a shared interest in preserving Hawaii's unique biological diversity.

In 2013 alone, the PEP program implemented recovery actions for a total of 128 rare plant species. Actions included: population monitoring for 106 species, placing 70 of these plant species into partners' off-site cultivation or storage facilities for propagation, as well as short- and long-term genetic storage, surveys for 42 species to protect the founders (wild individuals), and management of 64 species from invasive animal and plant threats.

The PEP program also works on alien plant control; site selection, planning, construction, and maintenance associated with ungulate-excluding fencing; rat trapping; removing trees from damaging plants, and bagging fruits to protect them from invertebrate and rodent pests. Twenty-two PEP species and 10 other rare plant species totaling over 1,020 individuals were reintroduced to protected natural habitats throughout Hawaii, an increase of 16 percent from the previous year. The PEP program also meets regularly with species experts on each island to review the status of each species and assess additional recovery actions that may or may not be needed.

The Recovery Champion awards began in 2002 as a one-time recognition for Service staff members for their achievements in conserving listed species. However, in 2007, the program was expanded to honor Service partners as well, recognizing their essential role in the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

Visit the Plant Extinction Prevention program's website at <http://pepphi.org/>, and for more information about the 2013 Recovery Champions, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/recovery-champions/index.html>.

For photos, contact Brent Lawrence at brent_lawrence@fws.gov.

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